



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
CORY MASON

WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY
62ND ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

To: Wisconsin state Senate Education Committee

From: Representative Cory Mason

Date: March 6, 2008

Re: Senate Bill 495—Aid to Homeless Pupils

Mr. Chair and Members, thank you for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 495 today.

We all hope that education will be the key to every child's success in our country. It is why our state promises an adequate education to every child.

However, children who are homeless face additional barriers to learning. It stands to reason that a child who comes to school hungry, tired, and unsure about where they will sleep that night will have a harder time learning than those who don't.

Unfortunately, it is becoming all too common for homeless kids to face these challenges in our schools. Almost 5% of students in my home district, Racine Unified School District, are homeless. That's 1,100 students.

Homelessness can make learning especially difficult for children. As we expect our teachers and administrators to meet adequate yearly progress and ensure that everyone can learn, we must acknowledge that homeless kids will have additional needs that other children do not. That is why allocating modest additional resources to address this problem is critical in ensuring that all children have a chance to learn and could lead to a reduction in the achievement gap between rich and poor.

To that end, I am offering a modest bill that would create a categorical aid to school districts of \$100 per homeless child.

I urge the members of this committee to consider voting in favor of this important legislation.

Thank you for holding this hearing today and I am open to answering any questions you have on this legislation.

**I've learned that
people will forget
what you said,
people will forget
what you did, but
people will never
forget how you made
them feel.**

Maya Angelou

What are the Causes of Homelessness and Poverty?

There is no single cause to homelessness and poverty. Homelessness and poverty is the result of a complex set of circumstances. Core issues are an increase in poverty in our nation and the lack of affordable housing. There is more poverty and homelessness in rural than urban communities.

Wisconsin

- About 600,000 people live in poverty in our state. Over the period 2003-2004, Wisconsin had the highest growth rate of people living in poverty in the United States. (2005 Report, Community Action in Wisconsin)
- Racial minorities suffer from disproportionately high rates of poverty. The poverty rate for black children in Wisconsin is 6 times that for white children: the worst disparity in the U.S. (Center on Wisconsin Strategy)
- Over 8% of Wisconsin's seniors live in poverty. (U.S. Census, 2000)

Employment-competing in the labor market

- Low-wage jobs
- Wage stagnation or decline
- Loss of manufacturing jobs
- Recession
- Low level of education or job skills
- Median wages in Wisconsin are up only 5% (68 cents) over wages of a quarter century ago, even though worker productivity increased 70% during that period. (2005 Report, Community Action in Wisconsin)

Cost of Living - spiraling costs of living, especially health care and housing

- Lack of affordable housing is the major cause of homelessness. On average, a parent will have to work full-time at \$15.21 an hour to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment. (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2003)
- The federal minimum wage for covered nonexempt employees is \$5.85 per hour effective July 24, 2007; \$6.55 per hour effective July 24, 2008; and \$7.25 per hour effective July 24, 2009. Wisconsin's minimum wage is \$6.50 an hour. (<http://www.personnelconcepts.com/>)
- For every 100 low-income poor people that need housing, 75 units are affordable. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Family Homelessness in our Nation and Community: A Problem with a Solution", Commissioned by Freddie Mac, Freddie Mac's hoops for the Homeless event, 1999)
- More than 50% of homeless children and youth lived doubled-up with relatives or friends. (Report to the President and Congress, 2005)
- Homeless children suffer three times as many stomach problems, fifty percent more ear infections, and twice as many hospitalizations as non-homeless children.
- (Homes for the Homeless and the Institute for Children and Poverty, 1999)

Family Violence

- Domestic Violence – nationally 18% of families are homeless because of domestic abuse.
- Over 65% of homeless mothers have been violently abused by an intimate male partner.
- Over 23% of homeless children have witnessed acts of violence within their family. (Better Homes Fund, 1999)

Other Factors

- Brain Development for children in poverty has a lasting effect into adulthood. (WISKIDS Journal, September/October 2005)
- Single parent households – more than 85% of homeless families are headed by single mother, the average family headed by a young mother with two children, mostly below age 6. (Better Homes Fund, 1999)
- Of single mothers, 41% don't have a high school diploma. (Homes for the Homeless and The Institute for Children and Children and Poverty, 1999)
- Structural and institutional racism and other forms of discrimination
- Disabilities and many other factors including cuts in public funding for anti-poverty and human services programs. (2005 Report by Community Action in Wisconsin)



Racine Unified School District
2220 Northwestern Avenue, Racine, Wisconsin 53404

Families In Transition
Education for Homeless Children & Youth
Elizabeth A. Erven, Coordinator
Ph: (262) 619-4620

Marie Pascoe Craig, Homeless Liaison
RUSD Director of Support Services
Ph: (262) 664-6700

FAMILIES IN TRANSITION (FIT) PROGRAM

Why does RUSD have a Homeless Education /FIT Program?

The Federal Legislative McKinney-Vento Act, as part of No Child Left Behind, has mandated all public school systems create assistance programs to meet the educational needs of children and families experiencing homelessness.

Who is considered homeless?

Children and youth ages 4-21 who (1) are living doubled-up with others because they have no choice and lack a permanent night-time residence, (2) have no lease, rent or ownership of property, (3) staying in shelters, motels/hotels, parks, abandoned buildings, awaiting foster placement or adjudication.

What are their rights?

Students who are homeless receive equal access to all educational opportunities and may not be segregated due to lack of family income or financial support. Homeless children and youth are entitled to (1) assistance in obtaining records, (2) transportation (3) free breakfast/lunch, (4) tutorial programs/after-school programs, (5) free book rental and school supplies, (6) referral services, (7) assistance with the appeal process if their rights have been denied, (8) placement at their school of origin for the duration of the school year.

How do we help identify homeless students?

If you believe you have contact with students and families who meet the U.S. Department of Education definition of homeless as stated above please contact Elizabeth Erven, Homeless Education Program/ FIT Coordinator, Phone: 619-4620, eeerven@racine.k12.wi.us, Fax (262) 619-4690.

You may also wish to discuss your concerns with your school nurse and/or social worker who should contact Elizabeth Erven immediately.

What happens next?

- (1) Once the FIT Coordinator receives an initial contact the potential client comes to Central Office for an intake interview. We discuss how to meet the educational needs (enrollment, placement, assessment, transportation, support services and materials) for each child. Referral services are also made available.
- (2) A release of information form is signed indicating who may be informed of the student's homeless status. Homeless student's confidentiality is protected by Federal Law.
- (3) A contact is made with the school building secretary, social worker, and/or principal at the discretion of the client. These individuals or the parent may discuss the needs of the student with other staff as needed.
- (4) A student may remain in the FIT program for the duration of the school year and/or up to two years if necessary.
- (5) A client may exit the program at any time by contacting the FIT Coordinator.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST. PLEASE CALL WITH ANY QUESTIONS!

From: Elizabeth Erven
To:
Subject: List

Items of need for the Families in Transition:

Back Packs all kinds (ages 4-21)
spiral notebooks (narrow and wide)
glue sticks
rulers
calculators
colored markers
colored pencils
scissors
crayons
pocket folders
Small assignment notebooks
padlocks for gym lockers

purse size kleenex
toothpaste
toothbrushes
deoderant
paper baby diapers (All sizes)
granola bars
Cliff bars
cotton tube socks

All new books are welcome
small calendars
disposable cameras with gift card to pay for developing.
alarm clocks

MOST NEEDED--Food cards in \$25 amounts, Walgreen's gift cards, Target gift cards

**RACINE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
EDUCATION FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH
ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS:**

It is the policy of the Racine Unified School District Board of Education to ensure all students are provided equal access to educational services, have an opportunity to meet the same academic standards, and are not segregated on any basis including their status as homeless.

1. DEFINITION

In order to establish safeguards for students in homeless situations, the following federal definition of homeless shall apply: any student who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence due to economic hardship.

It includes students who are:

- temporarily sharing the housing of other persons
- living in hotels, motels, trailer parks, campgrounds, emergency shelters
- abandoned in hospitals
- awaiting foster placement
- sleeping in a public or private space not intended for human beings to reside in
- runaways, abandoned children, or migratory children not in the custody of their parent/guardian.

2. RESIDENCY

The address given on the enrollment form is all that is required for proof of residency. The student shall be considered a resident when living with a parent, guardian, or person in loco parentis not solely for school purposes or for participation in extra-curricular activities. Homeless students who do not live with their parent or guardian may enroll themselves in school.

3. GUARDIANSHIP

For the purpose of school placement, a parent, guardian, or person in loco parentis who has legal or physical custody of a child or youth shall enroll that student.

4. COMPARABLE SERVICES

Each homeless student shall be provided services offered to other students such as:

- pre-school programs
- transportation services
- vocational education
- special education
- ESL, bilingual
- "at risk"
- gifted and talented
- school health and nutrition services
- Title I services
- after school programs

5. TRANSPORTATION

At the request of parent, responsible adult, or unaccompanied youth, the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Liaison or designee will request transportation be provided to the school of origin, school requested, or attendance area school (if funding is available) for the duration of the school year. If the school of origin and attendance area school are in different school districts, the two districts will agree on a method for transportation and share costs.

6. LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY HOMELESS LIAISON

The RUSD Homeless Liaison or designee shall ensure:

- homeless students are identified by school personnel and non-school personnel whose efforts are coordinated with other organizations and agencies
- homeless students enroll and participate fully and equally in all programs offered to their peer
- homeless students and their families are informed of their rights and receive referrals
- notice of the rights of homeless students are distributed and posted in public places including schools, shelters, and other locations frequented by low income families.
- the RUSD is compliant with all policies and procedures of the McKinney-Vento Act

7. DISPUTES

If a dispute arises over school selection or enrollment, the student shall immediately be admitted to the school in which enrollment is sought pending resolution of the dispute.

The EHCY Program Associate will provide a written explanation of the dispute, including the rights of homeless students, to the parent, adult representative, or unaccompanied youth. Appeals will be presented to the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services.

If the dispute fails to be resolved, the appealed decision may be forwarded to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youth.

8. INDIGENT CHILDREN

The principal or teacher in charge of any public school shall report to the Racine County Department of Human Services under s.46.215, 46.22, or 46.23:

The name and address of any child in the school whose parent, guardian, or person having control charge or custody of the child, is without sufficient means to furnish the child with food or clothing necessary to enable the child to attend school. Failure to report this information carries specific legal consequences.

The principal or teacher is also directed to immediately forward the same written information to the EHCY Program Associate.